A Continuation of the 1988 Family History Search by Ray and Pep Martin

Ray and I left Leesburg on Wednesday, January 14, 1988, and headed for Waycross and Hoboken, Georgia. Our search for our family roots had been very successful where our Mother's (Sara Pope Martin) line was concerned.

Now we were hoping to find something worthwhile about our Dad's home and people in that part of Georgia that is near the great Okefenokee Swamp.

My wife Dodie and I had visited here briefly some years back and learned but little. We had searched out the records in the Regional Library, and from newspaper files and City Directories, we were able to find the street location of the Martins' home and store on Albany Avenue. At this same corner, our father, Ira Ambrose Martin, had run a barber shop. A subsequent visit to the village of Hoboken had yielded nothing further of value.

Ray and I began our new search at the Regional Library and reread the directories and news files. Here, we learned that a sister of Ira Martin, Fanny Ida, had been married to an Oscar Allen. This was news to us, as we had information that led us to believe that Oscar Allen had married a different sister: Willie May.

We then learned that Willie May's real husband's name was Edward Woodard (from the directories). (The beginning of a remarkable series of clues was in motion, though we did not realize it at the time.)

We then decided to go to the Vital Records repository in the Bureau of Health Building on the other end of town. Armed with the birth and death

dates, as near as we knew, of our Martin grandparents—William A. Martin and Mary Ellen (Molly) Martin, and Ira Martin's brother William E. Martin and his wife—we expected to get some good starting information.

After a half-hour of searching, we learned only that the local County records contained nothing at all that we needed. Though flabbergasted and disgusted at the pitiful state of the local records, we refused to give in to an apparent impasse.

Ray wanted to see the neighborhood where the Martins had lived. (The old buildings are all gone.) A fairly new gas station stands on the corner where the Martins' store had been. Across the street and nearer the town proper stands a long, white, shed-like structure which contains a grocery store. Without any better notion of where to start, we went into the building and talked to the friendly lady at the counter, and her sister, who came from the back of the store. They became interested in our problem and called their father, who remembered the store building that was removed for the gas station. (This occurred in recent years.) He remembered Mrs. Lula Martin, widow of our Uncle William ("Bub"), who had died (as near as we knew then) in the early 1930s. We only knew that Lula had disappeared from the City Directories in the early 1950s. The father of the helpful ladies remembered her well and knew she was deceased and had left a daughter, Lula Mae, who married a Howard Davis. (They had a daughter, Marian.) The Davis family's last known location was Jacksonville, Florida. The ladies then asked if we had visited any local cemeteries. (We had gone to one, but could find nothing useful, as there were no records.) They suggested a look into the large local cemetery: Oakland. Encouraged by the friendliness of the people we had met, we made Oakland our next project.

At the cemetery, we looked for the office and found it in a small trailer-like building in the maintenance yard. It was empty. To pass the time, we wandered around the burial grounds but found nothing of interest in our short search. (It was vast.) Then a workers' truck drove by, and we hailed it. They were able to radio to the superintendent, who later met us at the office.

This gentleman was very helpful and called the City Hall, where the records were recorded alphabetically. He then took us to a grave of an unknown Martin family. Then he commenced a drive in his truck to another part of the grounds.

Ray and I couldn't find words enough to thank our guide, for in due time, we found the grave of our Uncle Bub and Lula, his wife. It contains monuments for William E. Martin and Lula E. Martin and that of an eight-year-old son, William E. Martin, Jr.

William, Sr.'s inscriptions read:

William E., Aug. 27, 1887-Nov. 19, 1932

Lula's read:

Lula Moore, Aug. 7, 1885-Aug. 15, 1977

Their son's read:

William Edward Martin, May 18, 1923-Apr. 22, 1931

Back at the office, the lot record was pulled, and we learned that William, Sr., and his son had been interred on the same date, February 8, 1955. Lula's death date matched closely her burial date. Comparing the burial dates with the death dates on Uncle Bub's and his son's gravestones,

it showed beyond doubt that Uncle Bub and his son had been moved from another gravesite. Thanking the Super, we made a beeline for the Regional Library again to look for obituaries in the old newspapers, which were on microfilm.

Bull's eye again! We found a long article on William E. Martin, dated November 21, 1932.

He was described as a merchant and formerly a barber. He had been ill for some years. He was survived by his widow, daughter Lula Mae, a brother (our father), and a sister, Mrs. E. D. Woodard of Waycross. (She was our Aunt Willie May, called Aunt "Will.") It also explained that young William, Jr., had been killed a year earlier by an automobile. It then revealed that the burial would be at Clayton Cemetery in Hoboken on the Tuesday to follow.

The next day bright and early found us on the road to Hoboken, some 20 miles from Waycross. Down we drove through a sparsely settled area of mostly replanted pines on both sides of the road. When only a few miles from Hoboken, we noticed a large acreage of woodland on fire. Ray stopped the car just inside the town limits to report the fire. The only thing we saw open was a small gas station-store which contained a genial, bearded young man. He quickly calmed our concerns about the fire. As fire marshal, he knew it was a controlled burning.

When asked if he had ever heard of a "Clayton Cemetery," he declined knowledge. He had lived all of his approximately 38 years in the vicinity and knew of several cemeteries within a 10-mile circle of the town. After some thought, he mentioned a little grave plot near his own home, just

beyond the town. Just in case it could be of some use, he drew us a little map of the roads near his home and the small graveyard.

Thanking him, we rode on into town to visit the town clerk, a Mrs. Martin. (She didn't know if her husband was related.) She gave us directions to numerous cemeteries around town and all the way back to Waycross! No one she asked or called had even heard of a Clayton Cemetery.

We started out on the road back towards Waycross. I had an idea of going first to a churchyard across some tracks and on the right side of the road, but Ray wanted to see the little graveyard near Mr. Boulard's house. (He was the storekeeper.) It was just to our left, so we ducked down a dirt road about a half-mile, until it ended at another, also unpaved. Crossing the road on foot, as per our directions, we walked down a wooded path to a place where the trail forked. Ray took one, and I took the other. Almost immediately, I saw some white objects shining through the brush on the left of me. Calling Ray over, we approached what indeed were grave markers.

The first one was that of Edward Woodard; adjoining it was "Willie May Woodard," our Aunt Will! Quickly looking at others in the line, we came to: William A. Martin and his wife, Molly Mary Martin—our grandfather and grandmother. All doubts in our minds were removed. This had to be the elusive "Clayton Cemetery," small though it was. What a lucky break it was that we had seen the "forest fire" and stopped at the little store.

The strange "coincidences" that, coupled together, had brought us so unerringly to this little secluded woodland graveyard gave us pause to wonder at the forces that influence our lives.

It was indeed an emotional time for us. We shall never forget the quiet beauty of the spot. Here, someone in recent years had caused the graves to each have its low-profiled monument of the same marble configuration. One could only wonder what manner of markers had been on the older graves, if any. After the joy of discovery came the sadder feelings engendered by the knowledge that we had only "met" these, our kinfolk, after death had brought them here. (Excepting, of course, Aunt Will, whom I remembered from her visit to Baltimore when our Dad died, and one of the dead soldier brothers, of whom I will make mention later.)

I then began photographing the markers. Suddenly, my automatic shutter camera quit and wouldn't function at all again. Back on the main road, we then inquired about a place to buy batteries in the hope that the camera would come alive. We were sent to the next town, which incidentally was the County Seat of Brantley County and had land records there at the Court House. (This was Nahunta, Georgia.)

New batteries didn't help, but the pharmacist at the drug store was nice enough to loan us his camera to return to the cemetery and continue photographing.

We then studied some of the other graves. There, we were reminded of the pathetic price some families had to pay during the Second World War. Two brothers, William and Wilbur Woodard, lay side by side, killed a year apart in Europe, 1944 and 1945, respectively. All told, there were 12 graves, all names Martin, Woodard, and Wainwright. We didn't know of the Wainwrights, though we knew they, like all the rest, were related to us.

I then recalled the boy who had called on us in Baltimore during the war years. He said he was a cousin, though I didn't quite get his connection

with us. I only remember him as a blondish, crisp, clean-cut young man who mentioned a brother also in the Army. He said that they were both Regular Army and would be pushed right up front. He also felt that neither would ever live to return home. How right he was.

We then went back to Nahunta to return the camera and visit the Court House. Here, a silver-haired, handsome chap in his fifties really went out of his way to help us. He showed us where our grandfather's land had been located. (We had some old records Ray had gotten from his research.) Grandfather's holdings were right where the cemetery is, or just north of it.

Next, we noticed an office marked, "James Woodard, County Commissioner." Later in the day, we caught up with Mr. Woodard. He didn't know how we could be related, but he knew of the little cemetery. After some head scratching, he remarked, "Did you see those two soldiers' graves there?" After our reply, he said, "You should go see Clara Highsmith; those are her brothers." His directions led us to a small frame house just out of the town of Nahunta.

A lady in her early seventies answered our knock, and this ensued: "Are you Mrs. Clara Highsmith?" "Yes." "Would you, by chance, be related to Willie May Woodard?" "Yes, of course, she was my mother." "Well, Mrs. Highsmith, we would like to introduce ourselves. This is Ray and I am Pep Martin. Our father was Ira A. Martin, and we must be first cousins to you." "Oh, I do declare…well, come right inside!"

Our visit with Mrs. Highsmith was such a joy! We three were so mutually interested and curious about our parents, and Mrs. Highsmith showed us a write-up of her family members, from which we took some notes.

There had been several brothers and sisters, including the two soldiers. One of her sisters was Lucille Woodard, who married Thomas Wainwright. He is buried in the Clayton Cemetery. Cousin Clara told us that that was indeed the name of the tiny woodland plat. She also told us that they all wondered what became of the family "Uncle Ira" had started in Baltimore. (He must have been as remiss at keeping in touch as his children have become!)

She then mentioned a mutual cousin: Mrs. Eva Kate Ellis, who lives still in Hoboken. She was a lady of advanced years, but was reported as very alert. After fond farewells, we set out to find cousin Eva.

She lives in a lovely dwelling next to the bank in the village of Hoboken.

A knock produced a somewhat frightened and incredulous lady whose natural good looks and intellect showed her as a fine person indeed (what we might all hope to look like should we be so fortunate as to endure eight decades plus seven).

We subjected her to the same question-and-answer ritual we had used with cousin Clara. When she learned that her mother, "Mattie," was our father's sister, she was so thrilled she almost collapsed there on the porch!

We were shortly in her tiny home, where she lives alone. It was extremely neat and charming with countless reminders of her family and mementos of the past, including pictures of her father and mother. Her father's name was Ben Moore.

She told us much about our grandfather, William A. Martin, who was the founder of Hoboken. He created a stop on the railroad for the transmittal

of lumber and timber from his saw mill. William brought men into the area from as far away as North Carolina to work for a season or to stay and settle. Later, he started up a turpentine still that was eventually sold out to others and is still in use today. When the young sons, William (Bub) and Ira, came along, they didn't like the turpentine business at all, so William, Sr., moved the family to Waycross, on Albany Avenue, where he opened a general store and feed house. When he died in the teens, his sons continued the business there.

She then showed us her collection of photographs from those early years. Here, for the first time, we saw a picture of the "Martin Bros. Store" with a young man out front who may have been our Uncle Bub! She then showed us a picture entitled by her, "Uncle Ira and his girl friends." It was a marvelous clear likeness of a happy young soldier of the First World War era with two pretty young ladies in "Middie blouses" and headbands. We had never seen a good likeness of our father, and this was just a wonder for us to behold!

On our return ride, Ray and I agreed that our twin family history quests could not have been more thrilling or informative.

When in the following summer, I was able to return with Dodie to Hoboken, Eva presented me with the pictures I had so loved, i.e., Dad and the girls, and the house and store where, incidentally, I had been born.

Pep Martin